

## **Expanding Professional Development Opportunities for Consultants: How to Incorporate Social Media into a Communication Center**

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The NSU Write from the Start Writing and Communication Center (WCC) has recognized the importance of developing a social media presence to highlight the achievements and services of the Center while providing professional development opportunities to staff members. This article is aimed at educating communication center directors and staff on how they can develop a social media presence for their centers. The article is divided into sections to showcase the essential steps of creating and maintaining a social media team, consistent branding, and content for various social media platforms. Additionally, it provides first-hand experience and tips from the NSU WCC's social media team about how to make the process manageable and efficient.

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*Follow the NSU Writing & Communication Center on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, and Snapchat @nsuwcc*

### **Introduction**

Through a sustained social media presence, communication centers can connect with university stakeholders and enhance professional development and engagement for students working in the center. Social media, according to Kim (2016), can “foster two-way relationships in an unscripted environment,” that can “truly ignite their social communities” (p. 5). To enhance engagement among communities across a campus, we argue for communication centers developing a student-led (under faculty/director supervision) social media team and maintaining an active social media presence (see Truman and Bryant et. al. in this issue for more on this type of social media teamwork). While devoting time and resources to enhancing and engaging students and other institutional members on

social media can seem overwhelming, we present implementation strategies that have been successful for our communication center social media growth (and have made the process considerably more efficient). The Nova Southeastern University (NSU) Writing and Communication Center (WCC) currently maintains six social media platforms: Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, Twitter, Snapchat, and Facebook. Since implementing a social media strategy and team of seven members in the fall of 2018, the WCC now has 469 Instagram followers (compared to 81), 259 Twitter followers (compared to 160), 112 Facebook page likes (compared to 40), with the additions of Snapchat, LinkedIn, and YouTube. While centers do not need to use six different social media platforms, we believe building and maintaining at least one or two can beneficially increase a center's engagement with their campus community.

### Getting Started: Building a Social Media Team

To make running multiple social media platforms manageable, we suggest creating a student-led social media team. The WCC has used teams as small as two members and as large as seven; the number of team members can vary based on the size of the center and the available budget--if any--for social media. While it does not technically cost money to run a social media platform, it will take up some staff members' time, and a team may want a budget for equipment, such as cameras, gimbals, and tripods, though they are not necessary. Other factors to consider when planning a team are team-based leadership positions, team roles, and the amount of time a center runs the social media channels.

Recruitment for a social media team does not just have to be a task for a director as student employees can get involved by identifying potential group members (see Truman in this special issue for more). Look within your center to find students who might be interested in being involved on the social media team. It may even be possible to work with a department or communication or business to see if they can provide an intern to help with social media development and facilitation, as those programs often offer coursework in marketing and media. Being part of a social media team is an excellent way for students to get the types of hands-on, experiential learning employers value (see Morris, Lehmann, & Dvorak's article in this issue for more).

As members of a communication center's social media team, students develop transferable and marketable skills. Along with developing a portfolio of posts and campaigns to use on the job market, students

learn both hard and soft skills that apply to a number of potential careers. When approaching individuals about joining a social media team, capitalize on the skills used in social media work such as writing and communication, leadership, organization, time management, interpersonal skills, research, visual design, problem-solving, and creative thinking.

### Social Media Team Roles and Responsibilities

Once a team is formed, assigning roles and responsibilities can help the team run more effectively. To help develop various roles in your communication center, refer to Figure 1. On the left side are professional titles for social media teams from a study conducted by Neill and Lee (2016). The right column shows NSU WCC titles and roles inspired by Neill and Lee but are modified to best fit the needs of our center.

Social Media Team Member Roles	
Professional (Neill and Lee, 2016)	NSU WCC
<b>Internal Social Media Manager - (Point Person):</b> Approves posted content and controls the quality of posts (possibly a director or faculty member).	<b>Social Media Faculty Coordinator</b> - Gives the final approval on the social media post before it goes live. This person must be a faculty member or director.
<b>Internal Collaborator</b> - Schedules social media team meetings and keeps minutes, organizes the content calendar, and maintains a record of	<b>Social Media Coordinator</b> - Assists in making edits to the posts and coordinating content.

social media engagement.			campus organizations, communication centers, and writing centers. This individual also replies to messages and comments on relevant and appropriate content from students, the university, and other centers with the approval from leadership.
<b>Branding Manager</b> - Creates social media content (including posters, videos, edited images, etc). This individual is familiar with center or university branding and style guides.	<b>Branding Coordinator</b> - This person monitors all branding material and social media posts that are produced for the center to ensure that all components of the style guide are correct. This individual also has to make sure that the style guide is up-to-date to that of the university.		
<b>Social Media Technician</b> - Posts approved content to each platform. This individual is can also take the role of a designer by taking photos/videos, and generating content and captions. They should be familiar with the center's branding and general audience. Operators can also help collaborate with the coordinator to develop stronger social media policies.	<b>Posters</b> - Approved team members who have access to social accounts to post content approved by the social media faculty coordinator.		
<b>Listener</b> - Observes and participates in ongoing social media conversations.	<b>Listeners/Engagement specialist</b> - Selected members of the team who observe and participate in ongoing social media conversations. Examples include, following other		

Figure 1. *Social Media Roles.*

**Communication and Shared Messaging Apps.** To facilitate communication between members, we recommend holding regular meetings and using a shared messaging app to ensure effective communication. At the WCC, we use Slack, which is a free instant messaging app designed with workplaces in mind. Other alternatives with similar capabilities are GroupMe and WhatsApp. We use Slack to share ideas, captions, images, and videos with each other in a timely manner, and facilitate feedback and approval of them. When crafting the post for the day, Adam or Monique, who are both posters and social media coordinators for the WCC, will post the image/video with a caption to the social media channel. Social media members in the channel can contribute edits to help improve both the image/video and caption. However, the most important final edits are made and approved by the WCC's administrative oversight, Janine Morris, Ph.D. Account operators cannot post to any social media platforms if they lack proper approval. This is to help ensure the accuracy, consistency, and professionalism of the post.

Communication is also achieved through regular weekly meetings. The NSU WCC social team meets one hour each week to brainstorm ideas content ideas for posts

and check-in on projects that take a longer time to produce, like a time-lapse video of the center. Members also use this time to discuss current trends with social and identify how to implement new strategies within content created for each platform. To improve organization and make sure all issues are properly addressed, the social media coordinator should assemble an agenda and document the meeting by taking notes. Having proper documentation can help members stay on-track of what they should be working on, and serve as a reminder of upcoming events and tasks.

### **Creating a Social Media Manual**

A comprehensive social media manual is an important tool for communication centers that helps maintain internal content consistency of university design and branding standards. To ensure that the information remains up-to-date, manuals should be revised at the start of every academic year. Social media manuals can either be created by the center's staff members or become a possible academic project for students in both undergraduate and graduate communication courses. For example, the NSU WCC's social media manual was created by students in COMM 3200: Principles of Public Relations, and was later updated in WRIT 5250: Social Media Writing Strategy. Social media manuals often include the following elements:

**Branding Instructions.** While a communication center's primary audience may appear to be students, there are multiple stakeholders university-wide that are exposed to your content. Because some of those stakeholders include university administration, paying close attention to branding and marketing is of particular importance. According to Quesenberry (2016), content marketing is a "technique

where brands create and distribute valuable, relevant and consistent content to attract and acquire a clearly defined audience - with the objective of driving profitable customer action" (176). While communication centers are not concerned with profits, increasing customer action, traffic, and awareness of the center is certainly important.

Many universities already have established branding guidelines to keep social media uniformity across the organization. Most institutions have their own social media manual. It is helpful to use the institution's manual as a guide when creating the social media manual for your communication center. The process of creating the manual can be cumbersome. As such, it is acceptable to adapt the manual from your institution's, while still implementing your center's individual style into the document. Social media team members should refer to their manual when developing posts or promotional materials. The two major components of the manual are the style guide and social media policies.

**Style guide.** Creating a style guide is a great professional development experience for students. According to the NSU Style Manual and Publications Service Guide (2018), "Because these publications convey our image and message to thousands of people, maintaining high standards of accuracy and consistency is essential to exhibiting a positive, professional image of the university" (p. 5). Components of the style guide include typography, logos, colors, platform guidelines, and common hashtags.

**Policies.** The second component of a social media manual is creating a list of social media posting policies for each account. This helps maintain a level of accountability and minimize the chance of

an altercation/violation with the university's main communication team. In the creation of these policies, social media team member(s) should consult university policies, copyright, fair use, and disclosure laws. It is also advised to consult with the leadership team or director of the center when developing posting policies. Some key topics that members should consider when developing the policies include:

- *Privacy:* Information about who should have access to the accounts and login information.
- *Interactions:* A plan covering the possible interactions the center will have with other social media users. Some scenarios to think about include customer service and crisis communication (e.g., when the center faces a negative/emergency situation or is faced with negative comments on their platforms).
- *Roles and Responsibilities:* An outline for account operators including information about maintaining appropriate etiquette and engagement on all social media platforms.
- *Communication Strategies:* A schedule of the number of posts per week, per platform. For example, the WCC posts to Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter Monday through Friday. Instagram highlights and Snapchat stories are typically only used during events.
- *Stylistic Concerns:* Information regarding consistent use of voice, tone, common phrases, and hashtags.

### **Social Media Calendar**

To help minimize stress and increase organization, social media team members should design a social media calendar. A social media calendar helps plan the content and timing of posts. These calendars can also track the growth of the center's following on social media platforms.

Microsoft Excel or Google Sheets are low-cost or free programs that are effective for creating calendars. While determining post content ahead of time is important (and is a great use of social media team meetings), it is important to remain flexible to accommodate new ideas as they emerge. A rigid calendar can become monotonous. Experimenting with new types of content, like stop motion videos or time lapses, can help increase engagement and following. Don't be afraid to change the post of the day, but ensure there is a member available to generate the content.

### **Content: Photos and Videos**

Communication center posts often serve multiple purposes in attempts to reach multiple audiences. Communication centers can use social media to: (1) Inform the university community about the Center and its services; (2) Highlight and celebrate consultant and center work and achievements; (3) Engage and interact with target audiences to facilitate meaningful discussion about the work being done in the center (see Bryant, et. al. in this issue for more on communicating to various publics). Photos, videos, and operator-generated marketing materials can be used to serve specific purposes.

**Photos.** Photos are the most common form of content posted to social media and, thus, are the easiest to work with. It is a simple action to take a photo of someone or something and post it. However, there are many important things to consider when taking photos to further a specific purpose. Things like the background of a photo, props, lighting, location, framing, etc. all impact how users receive and engage with posts. According to Hightower (2019), some tips to keep in mind when taking photos are using "negative or white space," "experiment with different angles," and

"light up your photos." There is a considerable amount of material online about taking effective photos. Having social media team members learn more about social media photography techniques such as the rule of thirds, basic editing, and image formats can greatly enhance the quality of photos taken.

Before taking photos, it is important to have an inventory of available tools. It is almost certain that you already possess the tools needed to get started, but there are additional tools that may make your job even easier. There are certain non-essentials that are nice to have, like a high-quality digital or DSLR camera, a full-range photo editing application (like Adobe Photoshop), a tripod, and camera gear (such as stabilizing equipment, studio lights, or a camera drone). However, many social media teams often get by with just a phone and some free apps to enhance the quality of photos. While technology is constantly changing, in 2019, the WCC makes heavy use of the following apps and programs:

- *Free photo editors*: Snapseed (IOS & Android); Polarr (Desktop)
- *Photo overlay generators*: WordSwag (IOS & Android)
- *Platform extension apps*: Boomerang for Instagram

**Videos.** While it is just as easy to hit record on a video as it is to snap a photo, videos can go a long way in more effectively engaging with social media audiences. However, depending on the purpose and scale of a video project, videos can also take significantly more time, effort, and planning to effectively realize. Videos make for great large scale projects with extended rhetorical purposes. Examples include consultant training videos, "commercials" promoting a Center and its services, interviews with students or faculty, etc. To help create videos, the WCC uses the following apps:

- Celtx - Screenwriting/Storyboarding website
- Lightworks - Free video editing platform
- Adobe Premiere - Paid photo editing platform
- Parrot - Teleprompting software
- ccMixter - Free website for finding public access/royalty free music and sounds for videos

## Benefits of Social Media

A center's social media acts as an informational channel, digital photo album, and a resource with outreach to organizations and members of the university for collaboration. It is a tool used to disseminate information to showcase and reflect on its' achievements, resources, student excellence, staff, and involvement on campus. By providing information through various social media channels, students, faculty, staff, and administration are able to learn more about the center's staff and resources. This kind of visibility and promotion can make students and faculty feel more comfortable with coming into the center and provide insight on why your center is a valuable academic resource to members of the university. Additionally, the use of social media is free(-ish) advertisement! The advertising taking place on social media can be helpful for centers that have a smaller or no budget for marketing or promotion.

## Conclusion

Over the past two years of implementing the social media strategy in the NSU WCC, we have observed that social media is an important area of scholarly focus and a growing institutional resource that communication centers can utilize to help grow their presence within the

university's community. Consultants who have been involved with our team have developed hard and soft skill sets such as leadership, collaboration, graphic design, resource management, and technology fluency that will benefit them in their future careers. Members of the social media team have also been provided opportunities to present their work regarding implementation of a social media strategy to scholarly audiences, such as the 2019 Southeastern Writing Center Association (SWCA) conference. A significant takeaway from our experience in working with our social media team is that creating and implementing a social media strategy is a process that is constantly changing due to different trends and limited lifespans on different social media apps. Creating and maintaining a social media team that is efficient, adaptable, cooperative, and communicable goes a long way in increasing communication center engagement. Making use of the observations recorded in this article can help your center grow its social media presence in a wholly beneficial way.

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